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## *A personal selection of the best books for curious minds.*

### FICTION

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Virginia Woolf

#### *Mrs Dalloway*

Clarissa Dalloway prepares for a party while, across London, the shell-shocked Septimus Warren Smith drifts towards crisis. A single June day in 1923, rendered in prose that moves as consciousness itself does.

George Eliot

#### *Middlemarch*

Dorothea Brooke, idealistic and intelligent, makes a disastrous marriage; Tertius Lydgate, an ambitious young doctor, makes another. Set in a provincial English town during the Reform era, it has been called the greatest novel in the English language.

Joseph Conrad

#### *Heart of Darkness*

Marlow travels upriver into the Congo to find the brilliant, renegade ivory trader Kurtz. Conrad's novella raises questions about colonialism, civilisation, and moral darkness that have never been settled.

Cormac McCarthy

#### *All the Pretty Horses*

Sixteen-year-old John Grady Cole rides from Texas into Mexico with his friend Rawlins, looking for the cowboy life that has vanished from the American West. What they find is harsher and more beautiful than they imagined.

Christopher Isherwood

#### *Goodbye to Berlin*

Isherwood's sketches of life in Berlin between 1930 and 1933 capture a city of cabarets, boardinghouses, and political violence on the verge of catastrophe. The source material for *Cabaret*.

Kurt Vonnegut

#### *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Billy Pilgrim, a prisoner of war in Dresden, becomes "unstuck in time" and experiences his life out of order — including the firebombing of the city. Vonnegut's response to what he witnessed as a soldier: part science fiction, part anti-war novel.

John Fowles

#### *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

In Victorian Lyme Regis, Charles Smithson, an amateur palaeontologist, encounters the mysterious Sarah Woodruff on the Cobb. Fowles interweaves a Victorian love story with a post-modern commentary on the act of writing one.

John Fowles

#### *The Magus*

Nicholas Urfe, a young Englishman teaching on a Greek island, is drawn into an elaborate series of psychological games by a wealthy recluse. The boundary between reality and performance dissolves completely.

J.M. Coetzee

#### *Disgrace*

David Lurie, a twice-divorced professor in Cape Town, is forced to resign after an affair with a student and retreats to his daughter's farm in the Eastern Cape. What happens there confronts him with questions about power, guilt, and post-apartheid South Africa.

Hilary Mantel

### *Wolf Hall*

Thomas Cromwell, blacksmith's son turned political fixer, rises through the court of Henry VIII as the king seeks to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Mantel makes Tudor England feel immediate and visceral.

Michael Ondaatje

### *The English Patient*

In a bombed-out Italian villa at the end of the Second World War, a nurse cares for a badly burned man who may or may not be English. Four damaged lives converge as the patient tells the story of his past.

Françoise Sagan

### *Bonjour Tristesse*

Seventeen-year-old Cécile spends the summer on the French Riviera with her pleasure-loving father, until he falls for a woman who threatens their carefree existence. Cécile intervenes, with devastating results. Written by Sagan at eighteen.

William Maxwell

### *So Long, See You Tomorrow*

In 1920s Illinois, a tenant farmer murders his neighbour. The narrator, an old man looking back, recalls the events and his boyhood friendship with the murderer's son — a friendship he failed. A meditation on memory, guilt, and the stories we don't tell.

Barbara Kingsolver

### *Demon Copperhead*

A retelling of David Copperfield set in the Appalachian Mountains, following a boy born to a teenage mother in a single-wide trailer through the foster care system and the opioid crisis. Kingsolver's most ambitious novel.

Alan Hollinghurst

### *The Line of Beauty*

Nick Guest, a young gay man from a modest background, moves into the grand Notting Hill house of a rising Tory MP during the 1980s. Hollinghurst writes about beauty, class, desire, and Thatcher's England with extraordinary precision.

Barbara Trapido

### *Brother of the More Famous Jack*

Katherine lands in the chaotic household of a philosophy professor and his large family, and is seduced by their world of books, arguments, and bohemian warmth. A witty, generous novel that deserves to be far better known.

Olivia Manning

### *The Balkan Trilogy*

Guy and Harriet Pringle, newly married, arrive in Bucharest in 1939. As Europe collapses around them, Manning tracks their relationship against the backdrop of wartime Romania, Greece, and Egypt with a devastating eye for detail.

Elizabeth von Arnim

### *The Enchanted April*

Four very different London women rent a medieval castle on the Italian Riviera for the month of April. In the warmth and light of San Salvatore, each of them begins to change. Delicate, funny, and restorative.

Francis Spufford

### *Cahokia Jazz*

In an alternative 1920s America where a great Native American city still stands at the junction of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, a murder investigation exposes the fault lines of a divided society. Spufford's most inventive novel.

Richard Powers

### *Bewilderment*

Theo, an astrobiologist, raises his troubled nine-year-old son alone after the death of his wife. Desperate to help the boy, he turns to an experimental neurofeedback treatment — with unforeseen consequences.

Benjamin Labatut

### *The Maniac*

A novel in three parts centred on the mathematician John von Neumann, from the suicidal despair of the physicist Paul Ehrenfest to the creation of artificial intelligence. Labatut weaves together real history and fiction to explore the terrifying power of pure intellect.

Evelyn Waugh

### *Brideshead Revisited*

Charles Ryder, looking back from wartime, recalls his entanglement with the Marchmains — a wealthy, aristocratic, Catholic family — from his time at Oxford through two decades of love, loss, and the inescapable pull of faith.

J.D. Salinger

### *Franny and Zooey*

Franny Glass, a brilliant college student, has a spiritual breakdown over lunch. Her brother Zooey, an actor, attempts to talk her out of it. Two novellas about the Glass family that are as much about love as about religion.

William Boyd

### *Any Human Heart*

The intimate journals of Logan Mountstuart, from 1920s Oxford to the art world of the 1960s, from wartime espionage to old age in France. Boyd charts an entire life with sympathy and invention.

James Salter

### *Light Years*

Nedra and Viri, a couple living in a house on the Hudson River, host dinners, raise children, and gradually come apart. Salter writes about the texture of domestic life in prose that has been compared to poetry.

Peter Ackroyd

### *Hawksmoor*

The novel alternates between 18th-century London, where Nicholas Dyer builds sinister churches, and the present day, where Detective Hawksmoor investigates murders at those same churches. Ackroyd's most atmospheric and unsettling novel.

Orhan Pamuk

### *My Name is Red*

In 1590s Istanbul, the Sultan commissions a book of illustrations in the European style — a dangerous act in a time of religious fundamentalism. When a miniaturist is murdered, the novel unfolds through multiple narrators, including a corpse, a dog, and the colour red.

Ben Okri

### *The Famished Road*

Azaro is a spirit-child who, against the wishes of his companions in the spirit world, chooses to stay alive. In a sprawling Nigerian city, he and his family struggle with poverty, politics, and the relentless pull of the other world.

W.G. Sebald

### *Austerlitz*

Jacques Austerlitz, an architectural historian, gradually uncovers his own forgotten past — as a child sent from Prague on the Kindertransport in 1939. Sebald's prose, accompanied by uncaptioned photographs, moves between history, memory, and loss.

Italo Calvino

### *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*

You, the Reader, buy a new novel by Italo Calvino and begin to read it — but it breaks off. Trying to find the rest, you encounter a series of different novels, each interrupted at a crucial moment. A novel about the pleasure and frustration of reading.

Marjane Satrapi

### *Persepolis*

Satrapi tells the story of her childhood in Tehran — from the overthrow of the Shah to the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War — in stark black-and-white graphic memoir. The view of a child watching her world transform.

## POETRY

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T.S. Eliot

### *The Waste Land and Other Poems*

Published in 1922, *The Waste Land* draws on myth, history, and multiple languages to capture a civilisation in fragments after the First World War. It changed the course of English poetry.

Seamus Heaney

### *North*

Heaney's fourth collection connects Iron Age bog bodies preserved in Danish peat with the violence of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. His most compressed and politically charged work.

Sylvia Plath

### *Ariel*

Written in the final months of Plath's life, these poems — including *Lady Lazarus*, *Daddy*, and the title poem — are fierce, controlled, and incandescent. Published posthumously in 1965.

W.B. Yeats

### *Selected Poems*

From the Celtic mythology of his early work to the violent, prophetic visions of his later poetry — *Easter 1916*, *The Second Coming*, *Sailing to Byzantium* — Yeats's range and ambition are unmatched in modern English poetry.

Derek Walcott

### *Omeros*

A book-length poem set on the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia, weaving together the lives of fishermen, a retired British officer, and echoes of Homer's epics. Walcott's masterpiece, awarded the Nobel Prize in 1992.

Wallace Stevens

### *Collected Poems*

From the lush early poems of *Harmonium* to the austere meditations of his later years, Stevens explored the relationship between imagination and reality with a philosopher's mind and a painter's eye.

W.H. Auden

### *Selected Poems*

Auden moved from the political urgency of the 1930s to the more personal and religious concerns of his later work. His range — lyric, satirical, meditative, comic — is wider than almost any other 20th-century poet.

## ESSAYS & IDEAS

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Michel de Montaigne

### *Essays*

The inventor of the personal essay, writing in 16th-century France. Montaigne's subjects include friendship, cannibals, thumbs, cruelty, and experience. He asks what it means to know yourself, and admits he never quite succeeds.

George Orwell

### *Collected Essays*

From *Shooting an Elephant* to *Why I Write* and *A Hanging*, Orwell's essays combine political argument with autobiographical detail. He writes with a clarity that makes his thinking look easy, though it never is.

George Orwell

### *Homage to Catalonia*

Orwell's account of fighting in the Spanish Civil War — the chaos, the cold, the betrayals, and the moment he was shot through the throat. A book about political idealism and its destruction.

James Baldwin

### *The Fire Next Time*

Two essays, published in 1963, addressed to Baldwin's nephew and to America: a searing analysis of race, religion, and the promise of equality. Baldwin writes with a preacher's urgency and a philosopher's rigour.

Virginia Woolf

### *The Common Reader*

Woolf's literary essays — on Austen, the Brontës, Montaigne, De Quincey, and many others — are models of the form: learned, personal, and written in prose that thinks as it moves.

Joan Didion

### *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

Didion's essays on 1960s California — the Haight-Ashbury scene, the Santa Ana winds, John Wayne — established her as a master of the observed detail and the sentence that cuts.

Susan Sontag

### *Against Interpretation*

Sontag's first essay collection, published in 1966, argues for experiencing art rather than explaining it. Provocative, wide-ranging, and still the starting point for any serious conversation about aesthetics.

John Berger

### *Ways of Seeing*

Based on a BBC television series, Berger examines how we look at art — and how images are used to sell us things. A short book that permanently changes the way you see paintings, photographs, and advertising.

Zadie Smith

### *Feel Free*

Essays on Brexit, social media, libraries, dance, painting, and the experience of having a mixed-race identity. Smith writes with generosity and intellectual restlessness across an extraordinary range of subjects.

Rebecca Solnit

### *No Straight Road Takes You There*

Solnit's latest essay collection explores climate change, feminism, democracy, and the liberatory possibilities of embracing uncertainty. She argues for the long view, the indirect consequence, and the power of collective action.

Ta-Nehisi Coates

### *Between the World and Me*

Written as a letter to his teenage son, Coates confronts the history and present reality of anti-Black violence in America. Indebted to Baldwin, but with a voice entirely its own.

Thomas Nagel

### *Mortal Questions*

Fourteen philosophical essays on subjects including death, the meaning of life, sexual perversion, war, and the famous question: What is it like to be a bat? Nagel writes with uncommon clarity for a philosopher.

Hannah Arendt

### *The Human Condition*

Arendt distinguishes between labour, work, and action as the three fundamental human activities, and argues that the modern age has dangerously elevated the first at the expense of the third.

Hannah Arendt

### *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Arendt's report on the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi bureaucrat responsible for organising the transport of Jews to the death camps. Her phrase "the banality of evil" entered the language and has been debated ever since.

Albert Camus

### *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Camus begins with the question of whether life is worth living and arrives at the image of Sisyphus, condemned to push a boulder uphill for eternity. "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." A foundational text of existentialist thought.

Martha Nussbaum

### *Not for Profit*

Nussbaum argues that education systems focused narrowly on economic growth are undermining democracy by neglecting the humanities — the disciplines that teach critical thinking, empathy, and the capacity to imagine other lives.

Richard Feynman

### *Six Easy Pieces*

Six lectures from Feynman's famous Caltech physics course, covering atoms, energy, gravitation, and quantum mechanics. Feynman had a gift for making the most complex ideas feel like conversations.

Naomi Klein

### *No Logo*

Published in 2000, Klein's investigation of the rise of branding, the outsourcing of manufacturing, and the growth of anti-corporate activism became a defining book of the anti-globalisation movement.

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## HISTORY & REPORTAGE

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William Shirer

### *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*

Shirer, an American journalist stationed in Berlin during the 1930s, draws on his own diaries and captured Nazi documents to produce an encyclopaedic history of Hitler's Germany.

Ryszard Kapuściński

### *The Emperor*

The fall of Haile Selassie's court in Ethiopia, told through the whispered testimonies of his former courtiers. Kapuściński blurs the line between journalism and fable.

Timothy Garton Ash

### *The File*

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Garton Ash obtained his Stasi surveillance file and tracked down the people — friends, acquaintances, informers — who had reported on him during his time in East Germany.

Svetlana Alexievich

### *The Unwomanly Face of War*

Oral testimonies from Soviet women who fought in the Second World War as snipers, pilots, nurses, and sappers. Alexievich's Nobel Prize-winning method: letting the witnesses speak in their own voices.

Ben Macintyre

### *The Spy and the Traitor*

Oleg Gordievsky, a senior KGB officer, secretly worked for MI6 for over a decade during the Cold War. Macintyre reconstructs Gordievsky's double life and his dramatic escape from Moscow in 1985.

Robert Caro

### *The Power Broker*

Robert Moses, the unelected official who shaped modern New York — its highways, bridges, parks, and housing projects — over four decades. Caro's 1,300-page biography is widely considered the greatest study of political power in American life.

#### NATURE WRITING & TRAVEL

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Patrick Leigh Fermor

### *A Time of Gifts*

In December 1933, the eighteen-year-old Fermor set off to walk from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople. This first volume, written decades later from memory and notebooks, covers the journey as far as Hungary. The prose is exuberant, learned, and full of wonder.

Patrick Leigh Fermor

### *Mani*

Fermor explores the remote Mani peninsula of the southern Peloponnese on foot, weaving together landscape, history, folklore, Byzantine churches, and conversations with the people he meets.

Bruce Chatwin

### *In Patagonia*

Chatwin's account of his journey through Patagonia — part travel book, part collection of stories about the extraordinary people he meets along the way — redefined the genre of travel writing when it was published in 1977.

Barry Lopez

### *Arctic Dreams*

Lopez spent several years travelling in the Arctic, and this book weaves together natural history, exploration narrative, and philosophical reflection on landscape, ice, and the idea of wilderness.

#### BIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

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Vladimir Nabokov

### *Speak, Memory*

Nabokov's memoir of his childhood in pre-revolutionary Russia — his family's estate, his first butterflies, his governess, his first love. Written with the same obsessive attention to detail that characterises his novels.

James Salter

### *Burning the Days*

Salter's memoir covers his childhood, his years as a fighter pilot in the Korean War, his time among writers in New York and Paris, and his long career as a novelist. Each chapter reads like a perfectly crafted short story.

Victor Frankl

### *Man's Search for Meaning*

Frankl, a psychiatrist, survived Auschwitz and wrote this account of his experiences — and the psychological framework, logotherapy, that emerged from them. His central argument: meaning can be found even in suffering.

Oliver Sacks

### *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*

Case studies of patients with neurological conditions — the man who cannot recognise faces, the woman who has lost her sense of her own body, the twins who communicate in prime numbers. Sacks writes with compassion and intellectual wonder.

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